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SELECTED TALES.

THE FLIRT.

CHAPTER I.

"My dear mother," said the young and beautiful Mrs. Stevens knowing aside her bonnet and shawl, "do you know, that I have been thinking that it is very odd that Augusta Miles does not get married."

"She is now past three and twenty, and so pretty and agreeable, such a fascinating girl, and so clever, and so much admired; and to my certain knowledge, she has been on the lookout for a husband, these last five years."

"What you said last, my dear," replied Mrs. Andrews, "explains all. If she looks out for a husband, she will never have one. It is no more her place to look out, than it is for me to make proposals."

"There is some truth in that, certainly," said the younger matron, thoughtfully; "but then you know, mother, she does not tell any one she is on the look-out."

"Pardon me, Louis," said the old lady, "she does. Her manners are too forward; she is too fond of display. She is brilliant, but she does not touch the heart; she is very fascinating, and proves the belle of the ball-room, and the life and soul of every private party; but though this is very charming, and brings her a train of admirers, yet not one of those admirers will ever make a change to a lover or a husband. Every one can see that her object is to make an impression, to get an admirer, &c."

"Really, mother," said Mrs. Stevens, "you have but a poor opinion of my cousin Augusta. But as to her being forward, and all that, see what a noisy, racy girl she is, always flirting with the beaux, and not half so clever or pretty as Augusta; and yet, see how I am married—have been married nearly a year, and am not of age yet."

"You were a very noisy girl, dear Louisa," said her mother, "but totally different from your cousin. Your flirtations, as you call them, were no flirtations. They were the fun of a thoughtless girl, fresh from boarding school. By your natural careless manner every one could see that making a conquest was the last thing you ever thought of having a lover till you found you had one."

"No, that is true enough," said Louisa, laughing; "I did not even notice that dear Frank paid me attentions till you named it to me."

"Just so," replied the mother, "and this proves my argument good. Now, if you had tried yourself to make a conquest of Frank, ten to one the blind god would have run away, and you would have been like Augusta. Now, look at Mary Miles; she is five years younger than her sister, not near so pretty, perhaps not so clever, though I believe she has talent, yet I will venture to prophesy that Mary will change her name before Augusta does."

"Do you really think so?" said Mrs. Stevens, in surprise. "No, I cannot agree with you. Mary is such a poor, quiet creature, without a word to say for herself. I do not really think she will ever be married."

"Well time will show," said the old lady. "And time did show, as our readers are about to hear."

CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Andrews was the widow of a London merchant, after whose death she still resided in the city, educating an only daughter, who at the age of twenty, became the wife of a young physician, to whom she was deeply attached.

John Miles, the brother of Mrs. Andrews, was a wealthy and prosperous merchant, who had been left a widower soon after the birth of his only son; who at the period of our history, was fifteen years of age, the much beloved and indulged favorite of his only remaining parent. Mr. Miles had two daughters, two whom he was warmly and equally attached. The character of Augusta, the eldest, has been sufficiently remarked upon in the conversation of the last chapter. As to her appearance, she was a beautiful brunette, with black eyes and wavy tresses, that were admired, not only by people in general, but by herself also.

Mary was eighteen years old, tall and slight, and unlike her sister, for instead of Augusta's black braids, Mary sported a profusion of fair ringlets, which coiffure could bring to straightness. There was no striking beauty in her fair face and gentle blue eye; but, though almost every one agreed that "Augusta Miles was twice as pretty as her sister," there were some who thought Mary lost nothing by the contrast.

"How many do you expect tonight, Louisa," said the young Doctor Stevens to his blooming wife, as he was preparing to leave the house on some professional errand; "will it be a large party, my dear?"

"Oh, no," said Louisa, "not above twenty—very friendly indeed, you know Frank."

CHAPTER III.

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"Very well, then, I think I shall ask Jack Clare to pop in. I am going to see him; you know he has not been well, but if it is a quiet friendly party, he might as well come."

"Jack Clare," cried Louisa, "who is Jack Clare, my dear?"

"Oh, Sir John Clare, my old friend at Oxford. He is a nice fellow, Louisa, a capital dancer's man—only I must not let him dance me, eh?"

"Oh, ask him to come by all means," said Mrs. Stevens; "a baronet will give an air to the thing. Apologise for short notice, you know, Frank, and say, it is nothing of a party. There, go, adieu."

At the appointed time, the carriage drove up to Dr. Stevens' house, and the brilliantly lighted rooms began to fill. The Janes began. There was Augusta, dressed with more elegance than any lady in the room, bowing on all sides introduced to new partners, waltzing with every stranger, and becoming, in short, what she had decidedly expected to become—the belle of the room. Presently she was requested to sing; she "had a cold," and she "could not remember one song," and she "had learned nothing new"; but she did sing and the company were in raptures. She afterwards expressed herself fatigued, and thought she should "rest in the carriage," and the company were in the deepest affliction; she presently declared she would not "give way," and meant to dance at least six times more, and the company were in raptures again, and straightway she was provided with six respectable whiskered partners for those six dances. Presently a servant handed a card to Mrs. Stevens, who immediately stepped into the ante-room, where a gentleman was waiting, who bowed respectfully.

"I believe I have the pleasure of addressing Sir John Clare," said Mrs. Stevens. The gentleman bowed, as he he was engaged to attend a patient—a doctor's time you know, is never his own. I am sorry he is not here, but as it is, perhaps you will allow me to introduce you to my friends."

The baronet replied politely, and they entered the ball room together, just at the close of one of the dances. Sir John Clare was introduced to many of the guests, and having found a seat by Mrs. Andrews, was conversing with her when Augusta Miles was handed by her partner to the vacant seat by the side of the baronet. Presently she joined in his conversation, and by degrees Mrs. Andrews grew silent and finally left her seat, and Augusta and the baronet conversed without her. "Pray who is that lady?" said Sir John to his lovely companion; "I have not been introduced to her. She is a beautiful girl!"

"Do you mean the young lady in pink?" said Augusta.

"Yes."

"Really, why that is my sister Mary. She is so dreadfully timid, so nervous, that she scarcely ever enjoys a party. Do you know she sings quite prettily, but she is so excessively nervous, that she cannot sing before company."

"Indeed," said Sir John, "that is a pity. But will you do me the honor to introduce me, and I will try and prevail upon her to sing?"

Augusta could not refuse and she and the baronet approached Mary. "Sir John Clare—my sister Mary." The introduction was no sooner over than Augusta was claimed by her partner for the next quadrille, and Sir John tried without success, to become as intimate with Mary Miles as he had made himself with her sister. But no! Mary gave him no encouragement; and when Augusta was at liberty, he addressed himself to her again; became her partner for three dances; her escort to the supper-room; and finally, handed her into her carriage.

"What a delightful evening I have spent," said Augusta, as they drove home; "positively I have quite enjoyed myself."

"I am glad of that," said Mary; "I have enjoyed myself too."

"You actually sang," said Augusta.

"Yes; I did not wish it, but I was so much pressed."

"Yes, Sir John Clare pressed you I know. He said he should when I told him what a poor timid creature you were."

"He seems a very nice young man," said poor Mary, in a most heartless tone.

"Oh! he's well enough," said Augusta, yawning; "but for my part I don't see much in him."

This was said in a very careless tone, and Mary believed it to be true; but in her heart Augusta was enraptured at receiving attentions from the only titled beau in the company, and delighted at the idea of making such a conquest.

"He asked if he might call," said she in the same yawning tone, "but I am sure I hope he won't, I don't want him." Oh! Augusta Miles! what a rare jewel truth is!

CHAPTER IV.

The next morning a handsome carriage drove up to Mr. Miles' door, and out of it stepped Sir John Clare. This was his first visit, but not his last, for some how or other he was so often "going that way" of an evening, and it was so handy to pop in and take a hand at whist with Mr. Miles and Alfred, and one dummy unless Miss Mary would take a hand for Augusta's "detested cards." And after the fiddle was over, perhaps Miss Miles would play an overture and sing an Italian song, for Sir John was "so fond of music;" or, may be, Miss Mary would favor him with one of her little ditties, and then he must go. Another night he had stidely become possessed of three concert tickets, and why on earth should not the young ladies go with him. On the whole, it was most marvellous if Sir John's carriage did not roll down B—street at least four times in the week.

"Well," said Alfred Miles one evening to his sisters, "who does Sir John Clare come to see—is it you, Augusta?"

"Nonsense," said Mr. Miles, "what a silly fellow you are, Alfred. For my part I see nothing in his coming. He has a game at whist, and talks politics with me, but I don't see that he does much else. However he is a nice fellow, and I hope he will come as often as he likes."

Augusta, who had been coloring deeply, now said, "Really, Alfred, you are so sure that I can't think why you—up on my word, it is so absurd, that—"

Poor Augusta wanted something to relieve her embarrassment, and a timely double knock was a convenient interruption, while the colour mounted to her cheeks again when she heard the step of Sir John Clare in the hall.

CHAPTER V.

It was a frosty evening, and a blazing fire roared in the comfortable parlour, where Dr. and Mrs. Stevens sat at tea, chatting very pleasantly.

"Then you really think Sir John pays attention to Augusta," said Dr. Stevens.

"I suppose so," said Louisa, "I called the other day and found them alone together, and she coloured finely when I went in. Besides, I know he goes there every night—his carriage passes here on its way."

"Well, I suppose it must be so, then," said the doctor, "but, really, I have known Jack a long time, and should never have thought he would have chosen such a girl as Augusta Miles. Well, it is a nice evening card here to the window, Louisa, and see how bright the moon is. Will Jack pass to-night?"

"No, I think not," said Louisa, "they said they were all going to the theatre to-night. Well, really, there is his carriage—stopping here, I declare. It is actually coming to see us, Frank."

Enter Sir John Clare. He was going he said, up to Mr. Miles'.

"Are you?" said Louisa, "why, don't you know they are all at the theatre?"

"Pardon me, Mrs. Stevens, not all. One of the ladies has a bad headache and cannot go."

"A headache! indeed," said Louisa, looking archly at her husband. "So Augusta has a headache; it has come on suddenly, for she was quite well when I met her out this morning. Headaches do come suddenly sometimes. Now, sit down, Sir John, and take some tea—bless me, Frank, why don't you ring for another cup?"

"You have mistaken the invalid," said Sir John with mock gravity; "it is Miss Mary who is indisposed."

"Then you will not stay long," said Louisa, passing him some tea, "you will certainly join the others at the theatre."

"Possibly, Mrs. Stevens," said Sir John; "another lump of sugar if you will allow me—thank you—yes, I may possibly go to Drury Lane."

"You know you mean to go," said the doctor, "you know you are going Jack—you and your possibilities."

"My dear Stevens, you actually seem to know better than I do myself. But pray excuse me now, I must go."

"This is a very shabby visit," said Louisa, archly; "and even a shabby visit from you is a rare thing now, but knowing the state of your heart we will not reproach you."

"You are too kind—too indulgent," said the baronet laughing and bowing himself out.

He soon arrived at Mr. Miles' house, and entered the parlor where Mary sat reading. She arose and welcomed him, saying "she thought he had been at the theatre."

"No, I seldom attend the play," said our baronet, "and to-night I am not so disposed. I heard you were not well, and came to inquire after you."

Mary thanked him, and wondered why he took the trouble; and then, somehow or other, neither of them found anything to say.

"At last Sir John began; "Mary, I am going to speak on a subject which I have long wished to mention. I know not whether I shall surprise you—I trust I shall not offend you; but what I have now to say must find its way to your ear. I have now known you some months, Mary, and have been a silent admirer of your goodness and the sweetness of your amiable disposition. I love you, dear Mary, I cannot say how dearly and deeply; and have loved you long, though I have never said so. I was once a witness of one of your kind actions, that raised you higher in my opinion than any fascinating behavior or elegant accomplishment could have done. I will tell you how it was."

Sir John's arm found its way round Mary's little waist. "I was attending your sister on one of her morning walks, when she broke the chain by which she held her dog, and the animal darted down a bye-street. I led Augusta into a shop, and went to look for her favorite. I saw it enter the open door of a poor-looking house. While it stood on the threshold I caught it; and as I glanced in I saw you, dear girl, sitting by a poor sick woman, whose child was in your arms, while your maid was emptying a heavy basket of provisions for this poor family. That sight was beautiful to me, Mary. I had always thought highly of you—from that moment I have loved you devotedly. I repeat this little incident to show you that it is for your worth—your goodness, dear Mary, that I love you—not merely for your matchless beauty. May I hope, dearest girl, that you will ever return my love?"

Mary's eyes were bent on the ground. The deep astonishment she felt overcame every other feeling during the first few minutes. At last she spoke and owned she never considered him in the light of a lover before.

"Then I will not press you to answer me now, dearest Mary," said the young man, rising; but Mary ventured to detain him, gently. "I have always had a very high opinion of you," said she; and then words failed her again.

"Mary, my own Mary! I see I am accepted," cried the lover, clasping her hand; you love me, and I am the happiest of men!"

There was a short pause, and he spoke again.

"Some fancy, I find that I entertained a regard for your sister. I know not why such an idea exists. Augusta can tell you that I have never given report any reason to say so. You were the object of my frequent visits, Mary, though I find you were unconscious of it. But you know me now, dearest, and now I will wait upon your father; and now I will leave you," he added, observing that Mary seemed agitated. The next minute he took a small case out of his pocket, from which he drew a superb diamond ring, and placed it upon Mary's wedding finger.

"Wear this, dear Mary," said he "until the happy day arrives, which I may change it for a plain one; then then take leave."

One, two, three hours passed, and still Mary sat on the sofa; her body had fallen from her hand, and her eyes were unshed on the table. Mary's bright eyes were fixed on her finger; and there sparkled as pretty as any lady ever wished to have—except a wedding ring. Certainly Mary had suddenly changed from an industrious little lady to a very lazy one; for there she sat, almost without moving until a loud rap announced the return of the play-goers. Augusta sauntered in, and threw herself languidly on the sofa, "dreadfully fatigued."

"Go to bed, Gussy; go to bed," said the father; "and Mary, too, go to bed, my child. Why, my Polly, how your eyes sparkle. The head's better, isn't it?"

"Much better, thank you, father," said Mary, quietly.

"That's right—that's right," said Mr. Miles, stroking her hair, "has any one been here dear?"

"No one, father, except Sir John Clare." Mary owned much to the lamp here, for, surely, if that lamp had not burnt dim, father and brother would have wondered why Mary's white neck and forehead burned the colour of her cheeks.

"Dear me," said Augusta, yawning, "has Sir John been here? I thought he knew we were all at the theatre. Well, it is a good thing he did not follow us, for what with Henry Mercer, and Saunders, and Fitzgerald, and that friend of yours, Alfred, our box was full; besides, he is such a bore." With this edifying speech our flirt followed her sister upstairs.

"If you please, Miss Miles, my master cannot come to you just yet; he is engaged in the library with Sir John Clare."

"Good gracious! what on earth can they possibly be talking about, and how polite of Sir John not to come and see me—see us, I mean, first. It is strange, is it not?" said Augusta Miles, turning to her sister, who was bending over a frame embroidery, and who murmured some unintelligible answer. "Really, Mary," continued Augusta, "why, what are you blushing about! Bless me! you are the colour of that scarlet flower you are working! And, goodness! what a magnificent ring you have got on! Here, let me look. Why, it is a diamond of the first water. Where did you get it, Mary—who gave it to you?"

Before Mary could reply, Mr. Miles entered the room, with a smiling face. He went to his youngest daughter, and took her hand.

"My dearest girl," said he, "I am much pleased, and somewhat surprised, at what I have just heard. Sir John has just left; he preferred seeing you in the evening. I need not say a word about his communication, except that you have my best wishes and ready approval."

Mary looked up but was too agitated to speak. Her father led her to the door and bade her retire and compose herself.

"And now, Augusta," said he, turning around. But Augusta was gone.

CHAPTER VII.

Sir John Clare, on leaving the house of Miles, drove again to Dr. Stevens, and found the young couple discussing luncheon. "You are a singular fellow, Jack," said Stevens; "first you cut us for a whole month, and then you come and see us for two days together. But how well you look, old boy, and how joyful! Why, you look like—like—"

"Like an accepted lover," suggested Louisa.

"Very well, Mrs. Stevens," said the good-natured baronet, "I possibly may for I am one."

"You don't say so?" said Louisa. Well then, I believe I may call you my future cousin?"

Sir John bowed and tried to look grave. "Bravo!" cried the young doctor, "I wish you joy."

"So do I, and I shall certainly go and see how Augusta is," said Mrs. Stevens. "Miss Miles is quite well, I believe," said Sir John.

"You went to the theatre last night, of course?" said Louisa.

"On the contrary," said the baronet, "I sat and had a long talk with Mary."

"You did?" said Dr. Stevens. "A brazen fellow you are! But come, Jack, you and I are old friends; you must tell me all about it. When did you—when did you—put the grand question?"

"Pshaw! she was at the play."

"Your pardon, my dear fellow; she was not well, and would not go."

"She was not in her room; she was sitting on the parlour sofa."

"Was Mary in the room then?"

"Yes."

"Pooh! you didn't make love before a third person, I know. I never could do it myself."

"I assure you Mary was in the room."

"Nonsense, Jack, you're cramming me! But I'll go to Augusta and make her tell me all about it."

"She doesn't know anything about it, for she was at the theatre."

Stevens looked at his wife with a face that seemed to say, "This fellow is mad!" and then he looked at his friend, then at his wife again, and finally took a large pinch of snuff, while Louisa set up a long ringing laugh. "You are a very extraordinary person," said she to the baronet; "but pray solve this riddle. We don't understand how Augusta managed to be at home on the sofa, and at Drury Lane at the same time."

"I never said Augusta was sitting on the sofa," said Sir John.

"You did, Jack; you know you did," said Frank Stevens.

"No, pardon me," said the baronet, "I simply stated the case, which I'll simply state again. I went last night to Mr. Miles, found Miss Mary Miles sitting on the sofa, sat down, made her an offer, and—"

"Made her an offer—made Mary an offer?" cried the doctor and his wife in a breath.

"I did so; I was not aware I had done anything so marvellous."

"Marvellous!" cried Louisa, "why, bless my heart, we all thought that you were in love with Augusta."

"Indeed," said the baronet, "I am not aware that I have ever shown such a state of mind."

"Oh, perhaps not," said Stevens, "but, you see, you were always going there."

"Certainly; but Mary lives at home as well as Augusta."

"Oh, yes, Jack! but then, you know, we never thought for a moment of Mary getting married."

"Did you not—but I have thought of it for a great many moments though. And now, my dear fellow, pray excuse this short visit—I only called to tell you the news. Good bye."

"Good bye," said Louisa; "I wish you joy."

"And I hope you will go and see how Augusta is, ma'am," replied our baronet, making his exit.

Stevens and his wife looked gravely at each other. "A pretty mistake we have made, Lou," said the doctor, at last—"Think of Mary being Lady Clare!"

"Ah! think of it, indeed," said Louisa; "I am quite astounded, and shall pop out directly and go and see her."

CHAPTER VIII.

The wedding was all arranged, and the day fixed. Augusta was of course to be one of the bridesmaids, and a favorite friend of Mary's the other. We cannot pretend to enter into the feelings of the former at this juncture, but certain it is, that she felt any mortification, she had womanly pride enough to conceal it; and according to outward appearances, rejoiced at the approaching event with the rest of her family. She had never loved Sir John Clare, but a titled husband was something worth trying for. However, she consoled herself with the reflection that Henry Mercer, a new admirer of her was quite as rich as the baronet, and of course she could soon make an entire conquest over him; and even if she should not, there was Mr. Fitzgerald, and young Saunders, and a whole train of others, who had discovered that she was a beautiful and fascinating girl, but who, in reality, had no thought of trying to affect mate wife, would prove a good and better mate wife.

Well, the happy day arrived, and our readers must pardon our omitting to describe it. A beautiful bride, richly dressed, a handsome bridegroom, a splendid dejeuner, &c., &c., are very nice things, but unfortunately, rather common-place, and when we tell our readers that all went on well, and that the happy pair departed on a country tour, we have told enough.

Apart from the rest of the guests, on a sofa, sat Mrs. Stevens and her aged mother.

"Louisa," said the latter, "look at Lady Clare—now see how elegantly she is dressed, how gracefully she bends to each guest, and how happy and blooming she looks. Now look at her sister, doomed to remain Augusta Miles; now I am certain—look at her now, I say, her wrinkled brow, her thin face, and that expression of meanness that has long ago spoiled her beauty. Twelve years ago, this day, Louisa, I told you that Mary would be married first—you see I was right; Augusta will, of course, be an old maid."

"You were right, indeed, mother," said Louisa Stevens, but still there is no disgrace in being an old maid, you know."

"No disgrace at all, certainly," replied Mrs. Andrews, "when the lady is contented or desirous of being one. But when a young woman spends her youth in needless flirtations, evidently much to her disappointment, why, then, if it is not a disgrace, it is a subject for pardonable ridicule. There is not a young man of her acquaintance that Augusta has not tried to charm. When her views for her present brother-in-law were defeated, my friend Henry Mercer, was her next object. Well you see, the result was, he saw through her plan, was disgusted, and finally married a very plain unattractive girl. Then James Fitzgerald was fixed upon by our coquette's relation; he went suddenly to India without taking leave of her. Then Frederick Saunders was to be caught, and it seemed more likely to be a match than the rest, till she was prudent enough to go flirting to the opera with that young college friend of Alfred's. Thence she had more beaux, that I know nothing about, and the end of it is that poor Mary, whom she secretly despised, is a rich baronet's wife with a handsome house, an excellent husband, plenty of money, and three sweet children. Alfred has been married a year and is prospering, and Augusta—why, she is certainly an old maid!"

Six years passed away. The success of the clergyman was one evening surprised by a visit from a stranger. A handsome, well-dressed fine looking man lifted his hat, bowed respectfully, and offered Mr. Burton his hand.

"Your memory is better than mine; if we have ever met before," said the clergyman.

"My name is George Chambers."

Mr. Burton had forgotten that he had ever known such an individual.

"I think I can refresh your memory by mentioning an incident," said George; "do you remember marrying a couple six years ago, and receiving for your trouble the fee of one cent?"

Mr. Burton laughed, went to his desk, and took from a small drawer a little roll of paper. Unfolding this, he produced the copper in question.

"Yes, I remember all about it now."

"Well, sir, I am the man—"

"You undoubtedly supposed I intended to insult you?"

"No—I thought you were poor."

"So I was. I did not know that I could afford to give you any more. Marriage, you know, is a sort of lottery. Had I given you five or ten dollars, and got a poor wife in return, you must confess it would have been a miserable bargain. Well, sir, the wife you gave me is a prize. It has taken me six years to find out all her virtues, and now I have come to make you a suitable acknowledgment."

He placed a purse in the hands of the astonished minister, who hesitated to accept it.

"You need not scruple to take it; thanks to my wife, I am now a tolerably rich man."

The old bridegroom took his departure. Mr. Burton examined the contents of the purse with lively curiosity; and he was not a little surprised and gratified to find that they consisted of ten half-eagles, bright, shining—apparently fresh from the mint.

And that was the last the clergyman ever heard of the bridegroom.

BEAUTY OF WOMEN.—I have seen a beauty and a charm in that woman, and venerated woman, who was the majesty of age beside the freshness of her son; she who nursed him in infancy, tended him in youth, counselled him in manhood, and who now dwells as tutelary goddess of his household? What a host of blessed memories are linked with that mother even in her reverence and chair days! What a multitude of sanctifying associations surround her and make her lovely, even to the